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Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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TACT.

(Continued.)

THE position of husband and wife towards each other calls for more Tact in their mutual relations than many of us fully realise. The man who has strained every nerve to win the girl he desires for his wife will often, after marriage, make no effort to retain her affection, while the wife may make the same mistake in relation to her husband.

It would seem that it is the special province of woman to adjust matters so as to insure the maximum of happiness possible in married life. The making or marring of *home* is especially in her hands; and where she starts with the love and esteem of her husband, it is in nine cases out of ten the woman's fault if she is unable to retain his affection.

Let it be the aim of the wife to preserve the charm that first won her husband's love. Was it by her beauty or grace? Let her remember that a woman can generally keep her beauty and her youth fresh and green in her husband's eyes, provided they look through the moral spectacles of love and faith and mutual confidence. The smile of greeting, the farewell look, the unfailing sympathy in weal or woe; interest in his work, his pleasures, his aspirations—wise but slow counsel—these are all links in the chain that will bind him to her; and so will his affection wax instead of wane as the years go by, and he will lean upon her, though she may not have been primarily endowed with either much cleverness or special good sense.

I am afraid it has hardly yet been realised that it is just as necessary for men as for women, to employ Tact if they would preserve that "delicateness in the air" which makes home life a refreshment and delight.

It seems to be generally allowed by both sexes that the men of a family should not be expected to "put themselves out" to any appreciable extent with regard to the other members of it.

Among the refined and educated classes—especially among those men who have been educated at public schools—there is a code of good manners, the infringement of which stamps a man as ill-bred. But these rules of good breeding can hardly be claimed as the outcome of Tact. They are simply that of a good education and of that higher consideration for women which is the inevitable result of it.

But in the home circle it is not uncommon to see this courtesy laid aside, and the men of the family expecting and receiving those attentions from the other sex which, on any others than on members of their own family, they themselves would render as a matter of course. The bestowal of what the French aptly call *les petits soins* by a man upon the women of his family is not common, but when it exists it invariably influences us greatly in favour of him who thus will often sacrifice both his convenience and comfort for the sake of others.

I think many marriages begun under happy auspices might fulfil their promise, were it not for the speedy cessation between the man and his wife of those very social graces which tended in the first instance to bring them together.

Possibly an average man may look forward with dismay to the idea of living his whole life for, as well as with his wife! but he expects with complacency that she should contemplate this with regard to himself. Some sacrifice is doubtless required from both in the dual life they have engaged to lead, and perhaps the amount of this mutual sacrifice is more equally balanced than many men are able to apprehend.

I would suggest to both that it is worth much effort to retain an affection which has perhaps been sought with much care and given with much joy! It should be "give and take" in all things. If the husband retains his courtesy and tenderness, the wife must equally be gentle, amiable, and beautiful "for her husband," both in body and in mind

I had written thus far, when taking up that ideal book, "The Garden that I love," I read these lines, and found the

thought that I would have expressed put into words, which preclude the need of my adding more, in this connection:—

“ Yet Love *can* last; yes, Love can last
The Future be as was the Past,
And faith and fondness never know
The chill of dwindling afterglow,
If to familiar hearth there cling
The virgin freshness of the spring,
And April's music still be heard
In wooing voice and winning word.
If, when autumnal shadows streak
The furrowed brow, the wrinkled cheek,
Devotion, deepening to the close,
Like fruit that ripens, tenderer grows;
If, though the leaves of youth and hope
Lie thick on life's declining slope,
The fond heart, faithful to the last,
Lingers in love-drifts of the past;
If, with the gravely shortening days,
Faith trims the lamp, Faith feeds the blaze,
And Reverence, robed in wintry white,
Sheds fragrance like a summer night,—
Then Love can last!”

The absolute confidence and affection that should subsist between parents and their children should, I think, do away with any necessity for the use of Tact by the parents; but its use may be legitimately employed otherwise than in the ordinary discipline of daily life,—such as in choosing the right moment for praise or blame, or in the wise individual treatment of difficult characters.

The greatest gift with which we can endow our children is the early habit of bending their wills in an absolute unquestioning obedience. Let it be an obedience of love rather than of fear; but here Tact ends and discipline begins. The boy at school will not meet with Tact in his master's treatment of him, nor in his after life, as soldier or sailor will his commanding officer consider his feelings when giving him orders. It does not follow that the girl will be dealt with much more tenderly. She, too, will be the better for having learnt when young how to obey.

We should therefore teach our children to use tact, but not to look for it from others; for if we bestow a too careful consideration on their sensitiveness, we may possibly enervate

them and thus make the battle of life—when it comes—harder than it need have been.

Finally, let us consider once more the two kinds of Tact with which we dealt in the first part of this paper. How are we to distinguish between them, for they are distinct? Both are equally powerful. It remains but to analyze the motive. I think that the spirit of that Tact which is expressed by the French *savoir faire* will generally in the end betray itself; for it is essentially bound to be fitful—intermittent. For while the exercise of that other Tact which is the outcome of a good heart will be *systematic*, the other will be exercised only when an object more or less selfish is in view, or, at any rate, when no sacrifice is involved in its exercise. I think that it is in this “ebb and flow” in tact, if I may so call it, that we shall recognize the true essence of the thing; even if our instinct does not warn us or our natural modesty revolt at the little flatteries administered as a snare to those who live in the Fool's Paradise of conceit. It is well we should learn to recognize the art, however graceful, of those who please for the sake of pleasing, and not at all for our sake.

And the true tact! the goodwill; the kindness of heart; the sympathy which inspires it: what is it? What is this that is able to colour with its pervading influence the whole of life, making what is plain, beautiful, what is dull, interesting, what is weary, restful, what is stale, fresh and green?

Is it not that likeness to God, the aim at which is permitted to us all, if in humbleness of heart we endeavour to walk in the footsteps of Him who is our pattern and guide,—the perfect Man?

If we would attain to perfect Tact we have but to copy Him: His humility; His love for the poor; His impatience of all pretence and hypocrisy; His pity for weakness; His tenderness for youth; and above all, His sympathy!

If God has blessed us with any gift,—if especially He has endowed us with the subtle influence of Tact,—let us look to it that we use it *only* to His glory!